Strengthening Disaster Recovery for the Nation
VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (VTC)
Region I

Time: October 27, 2009, Tuesday, 9:30 AM – 12:00 PM (Eastern)

Participating Locations: FEMA Region I, Connecticut,
Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire,
Rhode Island, Vermont

Participation Via: VTCs, Phone Bridge (only) and WebEx

Sectors Represented: Federal and State agencies, nonprofits and
private sector and Tribal representation

Note: This product is provided as a general summary only, not a transcript of the discussion.

Region I VTC Summary
Boston, Massachusetts
October 27, 2009

Region I participants addressed questions 1 and 4 as a group. Question 16 responses were directed to the Web site. The remaining questions were handled in Breakout Groups ensuring smaller group discussion and encouraging 100 percent participation in the process. Each VTC location was a Breakout Group. VTC locations were organized around State participation and Health and Human Services. Region I comments follow.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

NOTE: Responses are by questions posed and are noted using the original sequencing.

Q1: (Group Question) How would you define a successful disaster recovery?

Participants discussed successful recoveries by considering:
- o Community.
- o Messaging.
- o Better Than Pre-Disaster Conditions + Mitigation.
- o Infrastructure.
- o Health.
- o Housing.
- o Economy.
- o Recovery Partnerships.
- o Leadership.
- o Funding,
- o Forward Questions,

OVERALL
- Region I participants thought it important:
  - o **Recovery is viewed as a continuum.**
  - o Survivor needs **are heard.**
  - o That there is a **common understanding** of recovery goals.
  - o Lines of communication are open all the time and **communications** are timely.
  - o Recovery goals are clearly understood so that **expectations are appropriate** and parameters of programs are understood.

COMMUNITY
- o Region I participants expressed that it is important **communities** and **stakeholders define recovery success** — success is not defined from the outside.
- o Participants also expressed the need for a **baseline assessment** against which recovery benchmarks can be defined.
- o Some participants defined recovery as the community's return to **"normalcy."**

MESSAGING. Participants feel that **"careful" messaging** is important to successful recoveries. Messaging needs to include: Restoring "normalcy" and that there is a commitment that "**all parts/sectors** of the community are (to be) restored."

BETTER THAN PRE-DISASTER CONDITIONS + MITIGATION. Mitigation initiatives incorporated into recovery were important to this group. They want to see recoveries **achieve pre-disaster conditions or better** and expressed that mitigation initiatives in recovery efforts can help communities be better than before the disaster.

INFRASTRUCTURE. Region I participants feel re-establishing the infrastructure is a success benchmark and that it is a **public** and **private concern**.

HOUSING. Participants expressed that success depends in part on **permanent housing** being in place.

HEALTH. Healthcare and human service systems back up are included in Region I's definition of recovery success.

ECONOMY. Economy is re-established, the business community is **restarted** and **jobs** are "coming back" are essential to defining success.

RECOVERY PARTNERSHIPS. Region I participants noted that an outcome of successful recoveries is that State, Federal, nonprofit, private sector and all recovery stakeholder partnerships at every level of government are **better than before the disaster**.

- One participant expressed a different view. This participant said there is a need for clarification and appropriate expectations stating: "*. . .When we talk about returning to pre-disaster status – we need to adjust and speak of expectations. We can't resolve issues of society, as an emergency management agency, we don't have control over. We can better prepare for disaster and mitigate but we can't put people in better position than before. . . .*"

LEADERSHIP. Participants expressed that it is important the **State lead recovery efforts**; however, better partnerships are needed at the Federal, State and local levels.

FUNDING. Region I participants feel that success is also about the **availability of resources** and that available resources are allocated in successful recoveries. Success cannot happen until resources are available and "in the field."

FORWARD QUESTIONS
- Participants think success is determined in part by **what the future looks like**. Questions they feel need to be considered include:
    - *How do we prepare for **the next disaster** as we work towards recovery today?*
    - *What is the **"new" normal**?*
    - *How do we build **resiliency** into recovery?*
    - *How do we ensure we are better prepared to withstand the next disaster?*
    - ***How far** down the road do we (Federal and State authorities) go to help communities recover?*
    - *What are the **long-term implications** of the disaster and how do we address those?*

Q2:   (Breakout Question) Are there clear phases in the disaster recovery process that are useful milestones?

- Breakout Group participants answered "Yes!" Phases they identified included:
    - **Initial Phase:**   Identifies needs and **reassesses** the community to determine disaster impacts.
    - **Immediate Phase:**   Addresses **critical needs** and restores basic services.
    - **Intermediate Phase:** Citizens are out of **shelters;** shelters are closed. **Medical** needs have been addressed.
    - **Restoration Phase:**   Employment is back to pre-disaster levels. **Jobs** and **businesses** are restored.

Q3:   (Breakout Question) What features of Federal disaster recovery assistance are most important to you?

- Breakout Group participants felt that **shared information** was an important feature of recovery assistance as well as the ability to **convene recovery partners** and **facilitate addressing all recovery needs**.

- Others noted the availability of Individual Assistance (IA) and Public Assistance (PA). Other specific programs/features identified included:
    - Availability of **Small Business Administration** support.
    - Federal partners **on site.**

- Participants expressed that there needs to be a **better definition of IA declarations** and **"windshield" assessments need to be improved** upon.

- Respondents also noted the need for **awareness** building with regard to available resources and programs and the importance of including **mitigation** initiatives in recovery efforts. They added there needs to be an understanding of the "add to better" concept so communities can build-back "better."   Participants also said that **education programs** are needed.

- Tribal representatives expressed the following as important features of Federal disaster recovery assistance:
    - Help with **needs assessments, needs identification** and **prioritization.**
    - Assistance in communities **better preparing for a post-disaster future.**
    - Using the example of generators, identification of **specific disaster response needs** and helping to address them so recovery can begin.
    - And, in general **"meeting the community half way**."

Q4:   (Group Question) How would you measure progress and what specific metrics should be considered for a successful disaster recovery?

- Region I participants expressed again that the **community needs to define recovery success** and that the definition might be different by sector. For example, the definition of recovery success is different for the education community, the economic sector, etc.

- They also felt it was important that there was a clear understanding that the benchmark for success was a "new" normal.

- While some of the following comments are response-based rather than recovery-based, participants noted important recovery milestones:
  - **Response**
    - **Everyone** is accounted for.
    - **Basic services** are restored.

  - **Recovery**
    - Pre-disaster conditions are **restored**.

- Region I noted that an important measurement includes: **Reduction in need-based phone calls** from citizens and communities.

GAPS
- Region I participants noted there are gaps in recovery resources. Specifically, **insurance issues** as well as gaps in services to different populations. Region I participants expressed the importance of **different populations** having unique needs identified and addressed.

METRICS
- Region I participants identified benchmarks for measuring success along three (3) continuums:
  - **Barriers Identified and Met.**
  - **Resources Available.**
  - **Transition.**

- Suggested metrics include:
  - **Barriers Met**
    - Percent of debris removed.
    - Availability of and number of people in short-term and/or temporary housing.
    - Availability of and number of people back in long-term housing.
    - Community capacity increased.
    - Gaps in recovery resources identified and addressed. (Participants acknowledged that a metric is needed.)
    - Number of acres maintained or increased within Flood Plain Management.
  - **Resources**
    - **Public Assistance (PA)** funding: In place.
    - **Individual Assistance (IA)** funding: Needs accessed and benefits received.

    Participants noted there was a transition from response to recovery in the allocation of PA and IA assistance.
  - **Transition**
    - Participants felt a **smooth "hand-off"** from a Federal-led recovery effort to State- and local-led is an important recovery milestone.
    - A smooth transition includes the identification of "special" State and local needs and **connecting** them "back" to Federal and State agency recovery resources.
    - **Joint Field Office** hand-off has occurred from Federal-led to State-led.

- Region I participants noted **challenges** to defining and measuring recovery success, including:
  - *How is recovery success quantified when **informal recovery** starts-up at the response phase?*

- o *Who is measuring success and how is it being measured? From what **perspective**?*

- Region I participants also noted the importance in **stakeholder perceptions** with regard to success and that perceptions existed on several levels: Federal, State and local, and the importance of **transparency** in the process.

Q5:   (Breakout Question) What are best practices in managing recovery from disasters?

- Breakout Group participants responded to this question by noting:
  - o State actions need to include **all partners**.
  - o There needs to be continuity of **Case Management** integrating all agency resources.
  - o The importance of Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) and Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD).
  - o The importance of **proactive** outreach to the media.
  - o **Information sharing** among and between all partners.
  - o Program and resource availability **training** that includes teaching stakeholders and governing authorities how to access recovery resources.

- One participant noted that **Web EOC** (emergency operations center) is a very valuable tool in making recovery information more accessible.

Q6:   (Breakout Question) What are the appropriate State, local and Tribal roles in leading disaster recovery efforts?

- Breakout Group participants key roles for local, State and Federal partners:

ENTITY	ROLE
Local Partners	Assessments.
State Authorities	•Prioritize needs and issues. •Coordinate resources. •Direct State assets.
Federal Authorities	Identify resources and facilitate their availability.

- Additionally, participants felt that long-term recovery was dependent upon State, Federal and local leadership to:
  - o **Motivate** disaster-impacted communities to embracing a "new day."
  - o Encourage local communities to start down the **road to recovery quickly** and to **control their destiny**.
  - o Help communities look for opportunities to **mitigate** disaster impacts making the community and individuals safer and better able to withstand future disasters.
  - o Rebuild in ways that are "safer and stronger" **improving on the pre-disaster condition**.

Q7: (Breakout Question) How can the nonprofit and private sectors be better integrated into recovery?

- Breakout Group participants expressed the need for:
  - **Communication, outreach** and **education** so that recovery stakeholders were aware of services and programs and available funds. Housing was noted as an example.
  - **Thinking ahead.**
  - Proactively **identifying local contacts** and **partners** and getting them involved in the recovery process early.
  - Establishing relationships in advance, **pre-disaster** with fire, police and community resources that might be needed for recovery in the event of a disaster so that resources and partners are known.
  - Pre-disaster **planning** and the need for those plans to be more universally shared.
  - **Standardized** approach to recovery.
  - **Measurements** to determine what works and what does not.
  - Applied **flexibility** within programs.
    Team approach.

- It was again noted that for recovery to be successful, **resources must get those who need them**.

Q8: (Breakout Question) What are best practices for community recovery planning that incorporates public input?

- Breakout Group responses identified the following as critical to successfully incorporating public input into recovery planning:
  - **Information sharing** including the sharing of experiences.
  - Disaster planning and **communicating plans on a regular basis** to include plan updates. Quarterly and/or annually were mentioned as possible appropriate timeframes.
  - **Training** and **simulations** as opportunities to get community input as well as opportunities for building pre-disaster relationships.

- One participant noted that a **template** is needed that explains "how to access funds."

Q9: (Breakout Question) How can Federal, State and local disaster planning and recovery processes and programs be best coordinated?

- Breakout Group participants responded to this question within the following organizational framework:
  - **Leadership** support needed.
  - **Outreach.**
  - **Challenges**.
  - Authorities + Statutory **requirements.**
  - **Coordination.**

LEADERSHIP
- Region I participants expressed that for recovery to be successful, leadership in support of recovery is needed from the Federal Coordinating Officer (**FCO) level** and **beyond**. Support must also be visible.

- FCO and senior leadership must support recovery **planning** efforts, ensure the **right people** are at the table to discuss recovery, identify and facilitate needed relationships and message that recovery is a team initiative.

- More specifically:
  - Planning is important and leadership must support the need for **planning**.
  - **"Out of the box" thinking** and **policy level decisions** and guidance are needed. Think tanks at the Under Secretary level are needed to establish policy guidance.
  - Leadership must embrace the goal of getting **funding** ". . . out to communities fast."
  - Leadership needs to encourage **mitigation** efforts in recovery.
  - Leadership must encourage **robust** and **ongoing communications** between and among recovery stakeholders and authorities.
  - Leadership needs to encourage ongoing recovery **exercising.**

OUTREACH
- Region I participants expressed that outreach to other Federal, State and **traditional recovery partners** is essential to recovery success.

- Strong connectivity is especially needed with **nonprofits, local governing authorities** and **government officials** as well as the **private sector.**

- One participant noted that a **directory** of all resources, both public and private, would be helpful.

CHALLENGES
- Participants noted the need for the process to be "open" so that new players and **new resources** that might be unique to a specific disaster are not overlooked.

AUTHORITIES + STATUTORY REQUIRMENTS
- Region I participants expressed that it is essential that programs with recovery resources be **identified, understood** and that citizens and governing authorities **know how to access** them. Participants used roads as an example, noting that road recovery is dependent in part on **private sector resources** (for privately owned roads important to the transportation grid).

COORDINATION
- Participants noted the following as important to recovery:
  - A **standardized** way to identify all recovery ". . . moving parts."
  - **Consistent** and universally agreed upon definition of recovery.
  - Clear understanding of **roles** and **responsibilities** of all partners + (Emergency Support Functions) ESFs for recovery.
  - Side-by-side coordination after JFO closes to maintain connectivity.

Q10:   (Breakout Question) As disaster recovery is primarily a State and local leadership issue, what are best practices for the timing (including start and end) and form of Federal assistance and coordination?

- Breakout Group participants began this discussion by identifying recovery and best practices challenges and suggesting action steps to address:

Best Practices CHALLENGES

	NEED	ACTION
LOCAL	• Short-term sheltering • Personnel • Equipment	• Partner with FEMA to identify and address gaps within statewide resource availability. • Pre-stage sheltering and healthcare resources. • Ensure visibility of recovery resources to Federal and other partners. • Continue FEMA gap analyses. • Use reverse 911 system to ensure critical communications.
STATE	• Long-term sheltering • Hospital/healthcare • Communications	

Q11:   (Breakout Question) What are the greatest capacity challenges that local and State governments face in disaster recovery and what are the best practices for increasing that capacity?

- Participants addressed this question by suggesting that timing goals and metrics need to be established for **each phase** of recovery with an acknowledgement that each disaster is different with differing goals and possibly differing metrics.

- Recovery stakeholders need to ask and answer: *What's* needed at each stage? *Who's* needed? For example, timing of the **arrival of the FCO** and **identifying a State liaison officer** are critical to advancing recovery.

- Participants also noted that they believe:
  - **Recovery begins at response.**
  - More **recovery planning is needed earlier** in the rescue/response/recovery continuum.
  - End dates for recovery are, in part, **disaster-specific** and depend upon type and size.
  - Community capacity for **debris removal** is essential for recovery to progress.

- Participants discussed the **surge of volunteers** and **private and nonprofit resources** available post-disaster. They noted there needs to be a more organized way to utilize these resources suggesting a **FEMA-approved list of vendors** and **contractors** as a helpful too.

- Additionally, Breakout Group participants said they would like to see:
  - **Increased funding** to support recovery planning efforts.
  - **Assured ESF #14 (Emergency Support Function 14 – Long Term Community Recovery) activation at every disaster** to:
    - Leverage response phase.
    - Coordinate recovery within the State.
    - Coordinate recovery across State and Federal regions when needed.
  - Assurances that **all Federal services** are stood up and stood up early.
  - **Focus on children**. Participants felt that children were essential to successful long-term recoveries saying that "... what we do for them in recovery phase impacts communities long term."

Q 12: (Breakout Question) What are best practices for marshaling Federal assistance both financial and professional support – to support State and local efforts to recover from a disaster, and how can we work together to better leverage existing Federal grant dollars?

- Breakout Group participants began this discussion by noting while **all disasters are local** they felt there are universal needs to address. Some of those include the need for:
  - **Constant communications** to enhance coordination of FEMA and other resources.
  - **Outreach** (to counties, State, contractors) to build networks and identify resource availability. They pointed to the 40 to 45 city tour highlighting and educating communities about recovery resources as an outreach example.
  - States helping communities **build leadership** and **decision-making skills** to enable successful recoveries.
  - **Public input** processes in recovery planning and decision-making.
  - **Training** on grant availability, application processes and generally *"Who does what?" "Who can do what?"* after a disaster.
  - **Training** on the availability of all recovery resources and how to access, including deadlines for applying, overlapping programs, how to demonstrate need, etc.
  - **Training** on community assessments: how to do and how to use.
  - **Early Recovery Support Center opening** to include early partnership development with resource providers.

- Participants noted specific challenges to recovery success:
  - Having local **Emergency Managers on the State payroll** is a challenge; funding is limited.
  - **Match requirements** are also a funding challenge.

- They expressed the importance of the Emergency Manager position noting that identification and coordination of resources is difficult without the position and **leveraging opportunities** are likely overlooked.

- One participant felt policy issues and cost benefit analyses need to be addressed, specifically asking: *Should we provide recovery assistance in all disasters?* In this participant's view, communities need to "take control of their own destinies" and ". . . we (Federal partners) need to help develop capacity . . ." at both the State and local levels, along three (3) continuums:
  - o Decision-making.
  - o Public processes development.
  - o Training.

- The following themes were repeated by the second Breakout Group responding to this question:
  - o The need for **frequent** and **ongoing communications**.
  - o Federal involvement in recovery needs to be **early on**.
  - o Recovery efforts need to go **beyond putting things back together the way they were** pre-disaster, achieving instead an improved state. Participants noted specifically:
    - o The importance of **mitigation** efforts in recovery.
    - o Mitigation efforts should be **tied specifically to individual projects** as they were being "worked" through Public Assistance.
    - o **Mitigation funding** opportunities should be identified earlier.
    - o States should **reward good local planning** and **codes**.

- Additionally, participants expressed:
  - o Subject-matter experts (**SMEs**) need to get to the **field early** to assist and to build local expertise.
  - o **State** and **Federal agency infrastructures** need to be **reviewed** to determine if they still work and to determine if appropriate changes have been made over time.

Q13: (Breakout Question) What unmet needs are common to most disasters that do not seem to be adequately addressed under the current systems and programs?

- Breakout Group participants noted they wanted to consult with the State, but offered the following responses:
  - o Unmet needs are determined in part by the **scope of the disaster**.
  - o Disaster-impacted States and communities should be able to expect **ESF #14 activation at every disaster** — recovery stakeholders need to know it will be stood up.
  - o There needs to be a **closer coordination with small businesses** and the **private sector** in recovery planning and implementation.
  - o When Federal **medical teams pull out**, it is a challenge to handle recovery needs.
  - o Long-term services that address **mental health** are inadequate pre-disaster; this situation is exacerbated in a disaster environment.

Q 14: (Breakout Question) What are best practices for integrating economic and environmental sustainability into recovery?

- Breakout Group participants said they would like to see:
  - o **Greater emphasize Stafford Act Section 406** hazard mitigation in the recovery process.
  - o **Streamlined** and **simplified** grant processes and recovery processes **easier to navigate**, using an example of a 500-page document needed to apply for funding assistance.

- o Greater reliance on **public/private partnerships** for ensuring environmental sustainability.

Q15:   (Breakout Question) What are best practices for integrating mitigation and resilience into recovery?

- Breakout Group participants expressed the following as important to successfully integrating mitigation and resiliency in recovery:
  - o **Availability of Technical Assistance** to local communities when planning recoveries and implementing recovery strategies.
  - o Ensure **mitigation professionals review PDAs** as they are processed to ensure mitigation techniques are included.
  - o Mitigation Officers to **convene public briefings and kick-off meetings with a mitigation focus** early in the recovery.
  - o **State mitigation priorities** identified and **strategies** developed to address them, early in the recovery process.
  - o A greater role is needed from External Affairs operating out of the JFO, in providing **homeowner education** regarding mitigation assistance and the availability of mitigation resources.

Q16: (Directed to the Web site) What else would you like us to know?